



PUBLIC HEALTH

January, 2007
Vol. 2, Issue 2
www.dphhs.mt.gov/PHSD

PREVENTION OPPORTUNITIES UNDER THE BIG SKY

PRIMARY CARE AND PUBLIC HEALTH: AN ESSENTIAL PARTNERSHIP

The partnership of public health and primary care is an essential part of the strategy to improve the health status of Montanans. Many public health prevention opportunities exist within primary care settings. Primary care practitioners and public health workers deliver prevention services on the front lines of the daily battle to control disease and promote health. Without the continuing contribution of primary care, major public health objectives for Montana cannot be achieved.

What is Primary care?

Primary care is continuing, comprehensive, and preventive personal medical care. Primary care providers (PCP) include physicians in general practice, family practice, OB/GYN, pediatrics, and internal medicine, as well as family nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and nurse midwives. Primary care providers are capable of addressing most of the conditions for which people see health services. PCP visits account for approximately 60-90% of the office visits billed in the US. (1)

What Prevention Services Are Delivered By Primary Care Practitioners?

Primary care practitioners provide a wide range of primary and secondary prevention services. Immunizations for children and adults, and counseling to increase physical activity levels and improve diet choices are among the primary prevention steps that keep disease from occurring. Treatment of high blood pressure or elevated blood sugar, and referrals to smoking cessation resources are among the secondary prevention steps that decrease the risk of disease complications. These prevention services are central features of public health effort to improve the health of Montanans.

Do Montanans Have Access to Primary Care Services?

While most adult Montanans report having a personal physician, (%) report that they do not. Persons who do not have a personal physician are much less likely to receive important prevention services.

[INSERT TABLE]

What is Being Done to Increase Access to Primary Care in Montana?

The federal government established criteria which allow communities to be designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas or Medically Underserved Areas or Populations. Designations are based on a formula that includes having less than one primary care provider per 3,500 population, and on community indicators that reflect overall community health status, poverty rates, and infant mortality rates. Shortage designation allows PCP's serving uninsured and underinsured people to receive higher reimbursement rates for services rendered and for the facilities to have assistance in recruiting and retaining qualified professionals to practice in the designated communities.

About 20% of the US population resides in primary medical care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA's). In Montana, about 76% of the state's population resided within Primary Care HPSA shortage areas. Montana HPSAs and the variety of facilities currently in place to address provider shortages are shown in the figure on page 2.

Community Health Centers and closely related programs for Migrant health and Health Care for the Homeless are practices with PCPs who serve the underinsured for uninsured. In 2005, 76,520 patients received services at Montana CHCs of these 42,294 had no health insurance, and most had incomes below 100% of poverty level.

[INSERT TABLE]

[INSERT FIGURE WILL GO ON PG 2 re: Health Professional shortage areas and designated facilities, Montana 2006]

Recommendations: for increasing access to primary care for Montanans

- [to be added]
- [to be added]
- [to be added]
- [to be added]

For more information contact the Montana Primary Care Office: John Schroeck, Director, (406) 444-3934 or jschroeck@mt.gov; James Nybo, Primary Care Specialist, (406) 444-3574 or jnybo@mt.gov. Or, see detailed information at these websites: www.dphhs.mt.gov/phsd/primary-care/primary-careindex.shtml; <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/shortage/>

References:

1. [add references]

NOTE: The February issue of *Montana Public Health* will describe cervical cancer control in Montana.



1400 Broadway
Helena MT 59620-2951

Joan Miles, MS, JD, Director, DPHHS
Steven Helgerson, MD, MPH, State Med. Officer
Jane Smilie, MPH, Administrator, PHSD